

ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS
COMFORT SUITES, BISMARCK ND

March 14, 2008
1:00pm

Meeting called to order by Chairman Jenson. Pledge of Allegiance and Moment of Silence for POW/MIAs and those serving overseas.

Roll Call:

Present:

Carl Bloomquist
Wally Buckingham
Lee Finstad
Mike Fisher
Jerry Goll

John Hanson
Dave Hilleren
Rudy Jenson
Orletta Kilen
Jerry Meske

Dean Overby
Wayne Paulson
Lyle Schuchard
Gary Skarphol

Absent:

Dave Vandergon

Guests:

ND Veterans Coordinating Council
Mark Landis, Burleigh County VSO
Ron Otto, Morton County VSO
June Veit, Senator Conrad's Office
Joe Novak

Motion by Dean Overby to accept the November 2, 2007 meeting minutes, second by Orletta Kilen. Motion passed.

Speakers:

Glen Jackson, Director, Motor Vehicle Division

Spoke on the new veterans' license plates (there is a display showing the plates). They are available for purchase. The Division is looking into the possibility of motorcycle plates. It is up to the veterans' groups if they want to have plates designated the different eras (WWII, etc.)

Lavonne Liversage, Associate Director for Operations & Resources, VA Medical Center

- ▶ Fargo experienced an 11% increase in workload. Four new CBOCs have opened and account for some of the reason for the increase.
- ▶ Some administrative offices (ITD and business office), will be moved off-campus to help free up space in the building.
- ▶ TBI (Traumatic Brain Injury) Team is being initiated in Fargo instead of having to send veterans out of the area.
- ▶ Cataract surgery is now being offered in Fargo. Some of the complicated cases will still go to Minneapolis.
- ▶ “Welcome Home” events for returning OIF/OEF troops scheduled at the Fargo Medical Center for June 5th & 6th
- ▶ Mental Health Inpatient Ward closed down for renovation. Hope to have new ten bed unit opened by July. There are social workers in Bismarck and Minot full time. Grafton has a Social Worker Mondays and Tuesday and Jamestown has Mondays and Thursdays.
- ▶ Two major projects are in the 2009 budget, waiting for that budget approval.
- ▶ Doing away with lodging beds, instead veterans will be given vouchers (\$40) to go to hotels. There are seven hotels in Fargo working with the VA to provide rooms.

MG David Sprynczynatyk, Adjutant General, ND National Guard

- ▶ On March 3rd at a White House event, former National Guard member, Woodrow Keeble, was awarded the Medal of Honor posthumously. He is the first full-blooded Sioux Indian to be awarded the nation's highest honor for combat valor. Keeble first fought in World War II, having joined the North Dakota National Guard in 1942. He also won four purple hearts and the bronze star.
- ▶ Sgt. Justin Lampert will be presented the “Soldier’s Medal” by the General and the Governor for his actions in disarming a man at a casino in Las Vegas. The man had been firing a 9mm into a crowd at a casino and was attempting to reload the gun when Sgt. Lampert tackled him and kicked the gun away before any one else was wounded or killed.
- ▶ Update on mobilizations.
- ▶ North Dakota’s Guard has the highest per capita membership rate in the nation.

Wayne Bostrom, Area Manager, Job Service North Dakota, Bismarck

- ▶ A new computer system has been installed and one of its capabilities is “spidering”. It opens up the opportunity for more jobs to be available for those looking for employment on the internet.
- ▶ “Hire a Vet Job Fair” held in Bismarck resulted in eighteen employers participating and 65 – 70 veterans attending the event.
- ▶ Will be conducting three “TAP” sessions in Bismarck (Aug 22-24) and Fargo (May 31-Jun1 and Sep12-14). Funding will be available for those attending if they meet eligibility requirements.

The Administrative Committee and Veterans Coordinating Council presented a plaque to a representative from the Comfort Inn and Comfort Suites thanking them for their support of the organizations.

Kelly Schmidt, State Treasurer

- ▶ Update on the status of the Postwar Trust Fund.
- ▶ Pamphlet, "Military Families and Their Finances" distributed. All Service Officers have received the information.
- ▶ Overview given on resources available at the State Treasurer's website.

Lori Lashkewitz, OMB Budget Analyst

Update on the state side of the funding for the new Veterans Home. Grants and other state sources are being used to meet the 35% state share but they are still short \$150,000. A commitment is needed for these additional funds for the VA certification to secure the federal funding. The Governor will put the same amount in the Veterans Home budget but the budget won't be voted on until the 2009 Legislative Assembly.

Motion by Dean Overby to obligate \$150,000 from the Postwar Trust Fund interest earnings to the North Dakota Veterans Home construction project, second by John Hanson. Motion passed unanimously. [MOTION #1]

Veterans Home Update - Mark Johnson Administrator and Norris Braaten, Chairman Governing Board

Overview of new Veterans Home. Architectural plans will be submitted to the VA along with the funding certification. Completion date is set for June 2010. The ND National Guard will be helping with the ground work. Geothermal heat will be used at the Home.

Rent Policy Changes – Kristin Lunneborg

- 1.) Resident rents will be recalculated in January of each year and will become effective February 1. *Old policy said they would be recalculated in December and effective January 1.*
- 2.) Deleted section for skilled rent that related to reducing the daily case mix rate by the VA per diem that the Veterans Home receives. *Federal law change does not allow this.*
- 3.) Deleted section that said residents must give 10 days notice before discharging or they would have to pay for those 10 days.
- 4.) Changes basic care to be pre-billed. Rent will be billed the end of the month for the next months rent. *Old policy had us billing the end of the month for that month's rent.*

Motion by Carl Bloomquist to approve the recommended changes, second by Orletta Kilen. Motion passed unanimously. [MOTION #2]

Mary Kae Kelsch, Asst. Attorney General, Attorney General's Office
Gave the Committee information on the Veterans Preference laws regarding hiring the Commissioner of Veterans Affairs and the open meetings laws regarding the interview procedure. Veterans preference can not be used for promotions therefore the applicant that is already employed by the agency can not claim it again since they used it to get their current position. Justifiable cause discussed. The law states that the applicants can be sequestered during the interview process. The public has a right to attend but does not automatically have the right to speak.

Legislative Interim Study

Discussion on the Summary of the Bill Draft prepared by the ND Legislative Council to the Public Safety Committee with members of the ND Veterans Coordinating Council.

Motion by Gary Skarphol that the Administrative Committee go on record opposing the bill draft in its entirety, second by Lee Finstad. Motion passed unanimously. [MOTION #3]

Workforce Development Council Update – Lyle Schuchard
Resigned from position January 1, 2008. It is an ex-officio position with no voting rights.

Motion by Gary Skarphol that Bob Fode's name be submitted to the Governor's office to replace Lyle Schuchard on the Council, second by Dave Hilleren. Motion passed.

Department of Veterans Affairs Report – Tom Sumers

- ▶ Update on Women's Coordinator position. Betty has progressed really well and is in the process of building a database for tracking women veterans.
- ▶ CVSO Spring Conference is set for April 21- 23, 2008 in Bismarck
- ▶ Grant software has been updated. The Performance Audit Recommendation concerning the "Obligated Report" is now in compliance.
- ▶ VA Regional office is now manned on a full-time basis.
- ▶ "Virtual Veterans" software will assist the staff in tracking claims.
- ▶ Still looking for office space.

Chairman's Report – Rudy Jenson
Vouchers will be sent to the Veterans Home for this meeting.

Subcommittee Meetings

Committee recessed until Saturday at 8:00am.

Saturday, March 15, 2008
8:00am

Committee reconvened.

Roll Call:

Present:

Carl Bloomquist
Wally Buckingham
Lee Finstad
Mike Fisher
Jerry Goll

John Hanson
Dave Hilleren
Rudy Jenson
Orletta Kilen
Jerry Meske

Dean Overby
Wayne Paulson
Lyle Schuchard
Gary Skarphol

Absent:

Dave Vandergon

Guests:

Ron Otto, Morton County VSO
June Veit, Senator Conrad's office
Mitch Olson, American Legion State Adjutant

Subcommittee Reports:

DVA Subcommittee – Dean Overby, Chairman
Recap of meeting (see Minutes)

Motion by Dean Overby to accept subcommittee report, second by Gary Skarphol.

Motion passed.

Appeals Committee – Gary Skarphol
No appeals have come before the committee.

***Motion by Gary Skarphol to accept subcommittee report, second by Dean Overby.
Motion passed.***

PWTF Committee – Wally Buckingham, Chair
A motion passed that we oppose any legislation which takes control of the Postwar Trust Fund from the ACOVA,
***Motion by Wally Buckingham to accept subcommittee report, second by Orletta Kilen.
Motion passed.***

Budget Committee – John Hanson, Chairman
Committee plans to meet with the new Commissioner to address the budget and any budget concerns.
Motion by John Hanson to accept subcommittee report, second by Jerry Goll. Motion passed.

Legislative Committee – Lee Finstad, Chairman
General discussion held regarding the bill draft by the Interim Public Safety Committee. ACOVA unanimously rejected the bill. A motion was made to revisit three legislative issues: (1) the distribution of property tax regarding the different rates of veterans' disabilities, (2) exempting veteran's retirement income from taxation, and (3) equalizing hardship bonus between the National Guard and the active components.
***Motion by Lee Finstad to accept subcommittee report, second by Carl Bloomquist.
Motion passed.***

Motion by Gary Skarphol that Chairman Jenson send a letter to the Interim Public Safety Committee stating the ACOVA's opposition to the draft bill, second by John Hanson. Motion passed.

Motion by Dean Overby that one of the Public Safety Committee members be contacted to request that the five State Commanders be given time to speak at the next meeting, second by Gary Skarphol. Motion passed.

Motion by Orletta Kilen that the next meeting be held in May at Lisbon and members be encouraged to attend the next Interim Public Safety Committee meeting, second by Wayne Paulson. Motion and second withdrawn.

Committee members will be notified when and where the next Interim Public Safety Committee meeting will be held to determine if the committee meeting could be held at the same time.

Meeting turned over to Dean Overby, Chairman, Subcommittee on Veterans Affairs. Leanne Schmidt, Human Resource Management Services, introduced to the committee. She has been providing assistance throughout the process. The top three candidates will be interviewed today and will be asked the same six questions. The candidates are Tom Summers, William Blasczyk, and Lonnie Wangen.

Discussion on the candidates.

Meeting turned back to Chairman Jenson.

Motion by Dean Overby that Lonnie Wangen be offered the Commissioner's position contingent on the background check, second by Orletta Kilen. Motion passed unanimously. [MOTION #1]

Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted

Lyle Schuchard
Secretary